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Schiff, Mortimer Leo

Educational preparedness

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# EDUCATIONAL PREPAREDNESS.

An Address
by
MORTIMER L. SCHIFF
before the
ASSOCIATION OF URBAN UNIVERSITIES
at the
College of the City of New York
on November 15, 1916.

115 Jan 29-17

# EDUCATIONAL PREPAREDNESS.

It was with considerable hesitancy that I accepted the invitation so kindly extended to me to address you this evening, as it seems almost presumptuous on my part to speak of educational matters before a gathering of experts, such as this. We hear, however, so much these days about preparedness of all kinds, that it may be that a discussion of the subject of educational preparedness from the point of view of a business man may be of interest to you. And in speaking of such preparedness, I refer as much to training for public service, as for business. We need trained workers and intelligent citizens and these our educational system must provide. There are various kinds of national preparedness and educational preparedness is by no means the least of these. Discipline, thoroughness and efficiency are not only military virtues, but also requisites for industrial, commercial and civic success. The survival of the fittest still holds true and just as Rome fell because its people became decadent, so to-day, no nation can live whose citizenship is shiftless, inefficient, indolent or inadequately trained.

It is perhaps particularly appropriate at the present time in this crisis of the affairs of the world, when the future, yes, even the present is shrouded in so much uncertainty and doubt, for men following different callings, but pursuing the same ideals, to take counsel together as to how the growing generation may best be trained to cope with the serious problems which it will have to face and the situations which it will have to meet. Men of affairs, who are engaged in large business activities, professional men, who by their position can do so much to lead

public opinion and those actively engaged in the public service, should interest themselves in the problems of education and co-operate with educators and educational institutions, so that these may adequately meet the educational needs of the times. The example of European nations has shown us how important it is that an educational policy be adopted to train young men and women in thoroughness, efficiency and breadth of vision. It is, for instance, quite hopeless for us to consider a real expansion of our foreign trade, unless we have available a body of young men whom we can send abroad well equipped to meet the competition of other nations and trained to market our products. Our commercial education has been lamentably deficient in this respect, and it is a well known fact that we have been dependent almost entirely upon the foreign trained and the foreign born whenever we wished to find representatives for service in foreign countries. Indeed, we have found that even for clerical positions, those coming from abroad are, as a rule, better trained and more efficient. It, therefore, behooves us to consider what improvements or changes should be made in our present educational system, and what, if any, additional facilities should be provided to meet this situation. These are questions, the answering of which requires most careful study and thought. There is no doubt that after the titantic struggle, in which the European nations are so unhappily engaged, there will come a struggle of almost equal intensity for industrial supremacy, in which all countries will strain every effort to be victorious. The present world war is, as it is, a battle between schoolmasters, as the questions at issue are those arising from different schools of culture, thought and philosophy. This will be no less the case in the competition for the markets of the world and much will, therefore, depend upon the training given by the different nations to their growing generations. That sober-minded and far-seeing men in Europe realize this is very apparent from many recent utterances. The discipline



and training, which the war has given and is giving to foreign young men, is bound to be a tremendous asset to these countries, when they can utilize these forces for peaceful pursuits.

We must also consider, whether our present educational system makes adequate provision for the preparation of young men for public life, and, if not, what we should do to shape it as to enable it to do so. At the present time, those who wish to devote themselves to public affairs, whether federal, state or municipal, almost invariably study law and become admitted to the bar as a step towards this end. The legal profession has thus become almost our only gate-way to public life. I think we all realize that this has its disadvantages, and that other courses of training should be provided. The conception of citizenship has grown very materially among our people during the past years and we are gradually developing a body of young men, who are in a position to, and who desire to educate themselves towards contributing their share of public service. Facilities for training towards this end are sadly lacking and provision should be made that courses of instruction be available for those planning such a career, just as they now are for the learned professions.

We cannot depend, however, on collegiate education alone for accomplishing this and elementary and secondary schools must do their share by providing proper preparation. Whether they are doing so now appears very doubtful. There seems to be in our elementary and secondary education a lack of thoroughness, which, coming as it does in the formative period of a child's life, is apt to have very far-reaching effects. There is apparently not enough thorough teaching of fundamentals and the old-fashioned three R's no longer seem to be receiving the attention which they should. I think you will bear me out that the hand writing alone of the average High School graduate is enough to disqualify him for many positions in the business world. I do not wish to criticise our educational system, but I

think that you, gentlemen, dealing as you do with higher education, will agree that in many instances the material with which you have to deal is unsatisfactory, and that a very large number of young men and young women come to college improperly or inadequately prepared. One of the greatest faults in this connection, which has come under my observation, is that our young people are not taught to concentrate. There can be no real efficiency without the power of concentration, and it seems a pity that more stress is not laid upon this important factor. Another thing in which our schools seem to be deficient is in the matter of discipline. If the students cannot be disciplined with regard to their attendance, behavior and the like, then there is little chance of disciplining their minds. Positive knowledge is what is needed, not guess work. The world deals with facts and bluffing does not lead to success. How often do we hear a child, or even an older student say: "I do not remember, I learned that last year," or even worse, guessing at the answer to a question? There seems to be too little reviewing of what has gone before, with the result that there is but little accurate and thorough knowledge. How many graduates of our schools or even of our colleges, can name correctly the countries of the world, their capitals and their most important natural resources, or even state correctly all the states of the United States, to say nothing of their capitals? It may be said that if these faults exist, why try to develop our collegiate system? This does not seem to be a sufficient reason for not undertaking the work, as one great advantage in making rigid the requirements of higher education, is the effect upon secondary and elementary education. There is no doubt that if the collegiate standard is high, there must be a beneficial reaction upon the preparatory schools.

In this connection, may I point out that there seems to be a tendency in Commercial High School education to emphasize



too strongly clerical subject matter, such as book-keeping, business arithmetic, stenography and typewriting, business correspondence, etc. While these courses are important and must be provided, they must not be permitted to become academic, instead of vocational. They are apt to lack intensiveness and the teachers have often, I fear, not had practical training in business methods.

There appears to be a steadily growing belief on the part of the American people in the value of systematic school training; first, in the desirability of making elementary education available for all and, secondly, in providing proper courses of instruction for special training for the vocation which the student wishes to adopt. Business is no longer a trade, but a profession, and it is just as important that young men, who wish to adopt business or public careers, should have the opportunity of educating themselves along lines which will enable them to do so, as that Law Schools should be provided to train lawyers, Medical Colleges for doctors and Technical Schools for engineers. When that is done, the boy, who is expecting to enter the higher lines of business or of public service, will as invariably look toward a college or university to secure a part of his training, as does the lawyer, physician, or engineer. The facilities for this purpose are of but recent development and those thus far provided are still inadequate to meet the demands.

As is doubtless known to many of you, we tried to do something along these lines a short time ago here in New York, but unfortunately our plan failed of fruition. The underlying thought was that there should be real co-operation between business men, educators and the municipality, each contributing their experience and their efforts, so that something practical and effective might result. It would have been, to say the least, an interesting experiment and I am convinced would have been a distinct success. What the Committee of Commercial Education of the Chamber of Commerce of the

State of New York, of which I had the honor to be Chairman, planned to accomplish during the negotiations in 1913 and 1914, in co-operation with the Trustees of the College of the City of New York and with the city authorities, was as follows: It was proposed that there should be established in this City a College of Commerce and Administration and a Museum of Commerce and Civics, and that the old site of the College of the City of New York at Lexington Avenue and 23rd Street, should be utilized for this purpose. The City was to provide the site and the Chamber of Commerce was to furnish the sum of $500,000. for erecting the building and a fund of $200,000. for the establishment of a Museum, which sums had been assured to the Chamber. The City was to equip the building and to undertake to maintain the College and pay the running expenses of the Museum. The College and Museum were to be administered by a Board of Trustees, consisting of representatives of the City of New York, of the College of the City of New York and of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York. Frequent conferences were held between the parties interested and it was believed that an agreement had been reached on substantially all material points, but finally the plan failed, because, coming as this did, shortly after the outbreak of the European war, the City did not feel justified in authorizing the expenditure for annual maintenance, which would have been required from it. Negotiations having continued for more than two years, the donors had to be released from their pledges and the plan, therefore, had to be abandoned. The donors had most readily acquiesced in the delays and consummation of the plan, but as its accomplishment seemed impossible within a reasonable time, it hardly seemed fair to hold them any longer to their pledges. There is no doubt in my mind that the representatives of the City were as desirous as were those of the Chamber and of the College to consummate the plan, but changed financial conditions led some of the city officials to believe that it was better



to defer indefinitely or even abandon the establishment of the College and of the Museum. The general consensus of opinion of all consulted at that time was that there was need in the City of New York for an institution on the college plan, which should include in its curriculum and give particular emphasis to continuation classes holding their sessions in the late afternoon and to evening classes and lectures. By an institution on the college plan, we had in mind one similar to a College of Arts and Sciences, in that it would have substantially the same entrance requirements, would afford the same mental discipline and culture training and would lead to a baccalaureate degree, with provisions made, however, that practical experience and special knowledge might be permitted to take the place of certain counts in the entrance examinations and an incentive thus be furnished to young men, who had not been able to complete a high school course.

It seemed particularly appropriate that such an institution for higher commercial and administrative training should be maintained by the municipality and that instruction should be made available to all. Whether the instruction should be absolutely free, or whether some moderate charge should be made, or deposit required, was a question which was left for future determination. The tendency in all collegiate education seems to be to make it possible for capable youth to shorten the period of study by one or two years, and it would probably not be easy to hold for four years the ambitious and capable secondary graduate, whose entrance into a remunerative position did not depend upon a diploma from a College of Commerce. While it was our opinion that the College of Commerce, which we had in mind, should provide primarily a four years' course, we felt that facilities should be extended for completion of the course in three years, and that the work should be so arranged, that, even those attending only one or two years, could take advantage of complete courses and de-

rive benefit from the education thus received. We planned that the requirements for entrance should be similar to those now required for entrance into the City College, except that particular stress should be laid upon commercial subjects.

We planned further that the College should provide continuation and evening classes, with well arranged and self-contained courses, available for those young men who were already employed, but who desired to extend their knowledge of commercial subjects. To the end that the greatest benefit might be secured from this department of the work, steps had been taken to secure the co-operation of the merchants of the city, so that they would not only readily permit, but actively encourage their younger employees to make use of the facilities thus extended. It was also planned that the building in which the College was to be housed should provide adequate space for the installation of a Museum of Commerce and of Civics, which should, as one of its purposes, serve as a laboratory for the students. In our opinion this would have proved one of the most valuable educational features of the proposed College and would have filled a need, which I regret to say still exists in this City. In addition to the great reaction which such a College and Museum would have had on the entire educational facilities of this City, we felt that it would serve five great purposes. It would provide facilities:

1: For the training for public service.

2: For the training of those ambitious to attain administrative and executive positions. Young men of such ambitions would probably be willing to devote three or four years to a course of instruction, and although their number might possibly be limited, quality of training, rather than number of students would be the real test.

3: For the training of those whose outlook upon life is practically limited to a permanent career of clerkship, who would probably be willing to devote say two years to this purpose.



4: For the training through late afternoon and evening continuation classes of those already employed, thus fitting them for better work and advancement.

5: For giving opportunity for commercial and civic investigations by the utilization of the faculty and the higher grade students for this purpose.

In the two years, which have elapsed since the abandonment of this scheme, there is no doubt that considerable progress has been made in other directions in extending the opportunities for commercial education and for training for public service. During this time Columbia, the College of the City of New York, Cornell, the University of the City of New York and many others, have either planned or established Schools of Business and of Administration or have extended existing facilities. Much is still needed, and I am firmly convinced that the time is coming when as much emphasis will be laid upon providing proper educational facilities for training for business and for public service, as has heretofore been done for what has been considered a purely professional career. I do not feel competent to express an opinion as to the details of the curriculum, which educational institutions should adopt for these purposes. These would have to be worked out by the proper faculties with great care. The important thing is that the curriculum be practical in its nature and avoid becoming too theoretical, for which reason a large amount of field and laboratory work, in addition and supplemental to classroom instruction is advisable. The greatest difficulty which will have to be met is to secure proper instructors, as men who devote their lives to teaching are so apt to get out of touch with practical affairs. Education is for life and the lives of most men are practical, rather than theoretical or scholastic. While a man teaching a technical subject can keep up to a great extent his contact with new developments and new methods by discussion with the practical men whom he may meet, and by the study of technical

books and publications, this is hardly possible for men teaching commercial subjects or those dealing with public service. For these, there are few text-books and publications and it is, as a rule, only those actively engaged in business and in public life who are able to keep step with the times.

In creating Colleges of Commerce and Administration, or developing existing facilities, particular thought should be given to the educational needs of young men who are not absolutely dependent upon finding at an early age an immediately paying position. In other words, not to train clerks, but to give young men, who are able to enter the business world on a favorable basis, without at once having to earn their livelihood, or who have sufficient independent means to enter public life, an education to enable them to do so. I do not favor graduate schools for this purpose, except for the very limited number who may wish to pursue special courses of study, but prefer colleges running concurrently with, but separately from Colleges of Arts and Sciences. This would not prevent facilities of other departments of a University being availed of, if feasible, but the student upon entering college should definitely enroll himself as a student in the School of Commerce and Administration, with a definite course of study mapped out for him, possibly partly required and partly elective, leading upon its completion to a degree corresponding to the B. A. of the College of Arts. Provision could then be made for graduate study, in addition to this, leading to a Master's Degree. In pursuing this plan, the appeal would probably be to a more limited body of young men, but provision for the others could and should be made if the college is located in a large centre of population by providing afternoon and evening continuation classes and courses. Government, as well as business, is becoming more and more scientific and we need trained officials for domestic, as well as for foreign service. A College of Commerce of this nature lends itself particularly well to this purpose and without much addition to its curriculum can readily provide the proper facilities for such training. In fact it should be not only a College of Commerce, but also one of Administration, of Public Service and of Civics, and its graduates equipped to enter any one of these fields. Connected with such a college, if in any way possible, there should be a Museum of Commerce and of Civics, with ample library facilities to constitute a laboratory and place of reference.



While it is somewhat a matter of detail, may I repeat here a suggestion in regard to the method of teaching foreign languages, which I have made from time to time to various educators, with whom I have had the privilege of coming in contact. It seems to me that our collegiate system of teaching languages is wrong, in that the spoken language is neglected, and too much emphasis is laid upon the literature and written language. It has been the experience of everyone, I believe, that the average college graduate, who has not had special outside facilities for learning modern languages, is unable to speak them or even to write them properly, notwithstanding the fact that he may have studied them during his school and college course. It would be well, after the student has received a sufficient grounding in the language in question, to have some definite subject, if possible one connected with the country of the language in question, actually taught in that language by a native of the country. For instance, with the development of our trade with South America, a knowledge of Spanish is becoming more and more necessary, and it might be well to try the experiment, after the student has had a certain preliminary course of instruction in Spanish, to have some subject, such as, let us say, South American commercial geography taught by an Argentine in Spanish.

One of the results of the European war has been the impetus given to our foreign trade, but if we wish to continue this expansion, when conditions all over the world be-

come normal again, which we all hope may be soon, we must train our growing youth in such a manner as to make them available for this purpose, so that we may be no longer so largely dependent as heretofore upon foreign trained and foreign born. The nations now unhappily at war will need and will use the best of their brains for their own reconstruction and for the recovery of their foreign markets and we shall require in this country, in fact need now, an efficient and well trained body of young men, if we wish to compete with other countries and maintain and extend our position in international trade. It seems particularly appropriate that you, gentlemen, associated as you are with Urban Universities, should take the lead in this, as it is the cities primarily which furnish the best facilities for such training. The greatest business enterprises of the world are at your doors and I know you can secure without difficulty the co-operation of business men to make them available to you as laboratories. These, combined with scientific and well planned courses of instruction, will give us a system of commercial education second to none and enable us to provide for our growing trade and commerce and for our public service, a body of young men really efficiently and effectively prepared.

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